

# **Understanding How Functional Classification Applies in Transportation**

## **Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities**

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#### **Functional Class of Roads**

Some correspondence on the local match issue questioned how the determination of functional class is made. The criteria followed for evaluating a road's functional class is contained in federal guidelines. Functional classification is the process by which roads are grouped into classes according to the character of service they are intended to provide. Guidance criteria and procedures for determining functional classification are provided in the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) publication "Highway Functional Classification-Concepts, Criteria, and Procedures (revised March, 1989).

A road's functional classification generally is determined by its role in meeting two basic travel requirements: property access and travel mobility. Access occurs at both ends of any trip. Travel mobility can be at varying levels and usually is referred to as "level of service." The most basic component of "level of service" is operating speed or trip travel time. Travel distance also plays a role in determining fixed requirement and is necessary how a road meets the "access" and "mobility" requirements.

The functional classification hierarchy is comprised of "local," "collector," and "arterial" road systems:

- **"local"** roads primarily serve to provide direct access to adjacent land; they offer the lowest level of mobility and provide access to higher functionally classed roads
- **"collector"** roads offer an intermediate level of service between that provided by "local" roads and "arterial" roads; they provide land access service, collect traffic from "local" roads, serve small communities directly, provide traffic circulation in larger communities, connect communities to the arterial network, provide service to important traffic generators, and serve as intra-region travel corridors
- **"arterial"** roads emphasize a high level of mobility for through movement: they serve the major centers of activity of a metropolitan area; provide service for the highest traffic volume corridors; and link cities, larger towns, and important traffic generators to form an integrated road network that provides interstate and inter-region service.

DOT&PF maintains functional classification data in its transportation database, the Highway Analysis System for most roads in Alaska. Copies of this classification data can be obtained through the regional offices of DOT&PF. These determinations are reviewed and approved by the FHWA. This database is subject to review on a periodic basis to verify that the correct functional class has been designated to each road.